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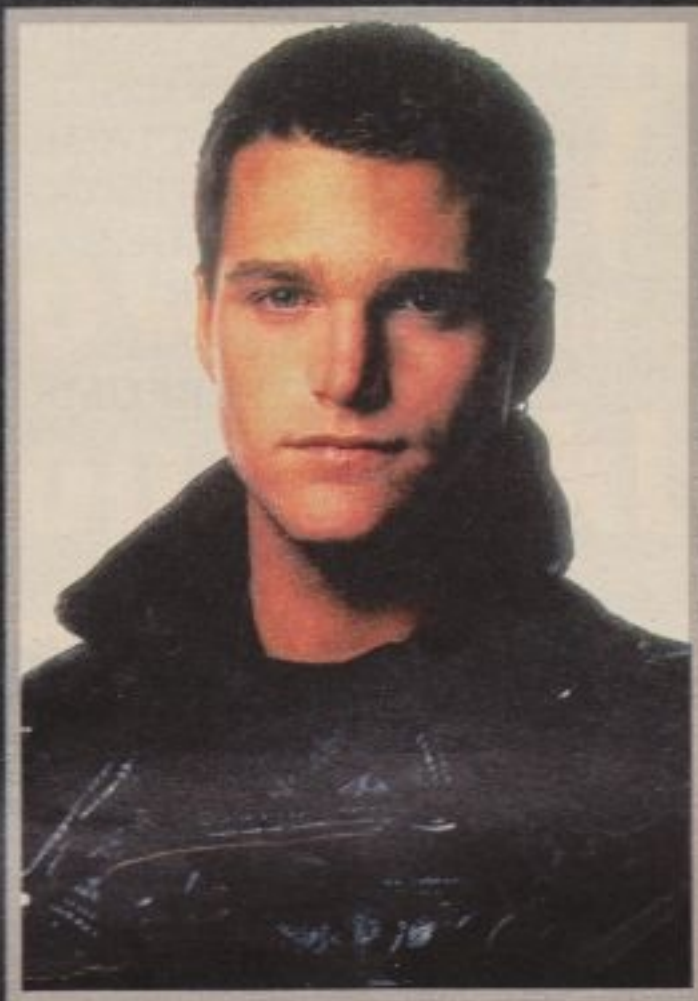
MAGAZINE

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Hasn't he grown?

HOLY CODPIECE! THE BOY WONDER BECOMES A MAN



HOW CAMP IS THE CAPED CRUSADER? IS GOTHAM CITY REALLY A HOTBED OF SIN? FOR THESE QUESTIONS AND MORE, ASK CHRIS "ROBIN" O'DONNELL ABOUT BATMAN AND SNOGGIN' BY STEPHEN REBELLO

Holy codpiece



Those with fond memories of Batman the first time round – in the comics and that TV series – may gasp and avert their eyes at the new-look Nineties Robin in *Batman Forever*. OK, there were always a few sexual nuances eddying around. But this bulging, sprayed-on, muscle-bound bodysuit? Pow! Oof!

The transformation from Robin, Boy Wonder, to Robin, Sex God, has not been lost on the actor inside that leather and latex, Chris O'Donnell – late of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Scent of a Woman*, and *Circle of Friends*.

"I showed up for the first costume fitting for *Batman Forever* and they threw me this thong jockstrap and said: 'Put this on.' I thought: 'Oh my God, what have I gotten myself into?' Luckily, in some scenes everyone is

wearing one – at least, that's what they've told me. Then I've got a full-body, spandex-latex, real superhero fighting jumpsuit. It's not anything like our TV Boy Wonder. Luckily, it's got zippers so you can go to the bathroom. I guess Michael Keaton didn't have those."

So will O'Donnell be stuffing his Bat-pouch?

He shoots back: "What are you talking about? I already have done! It reminds me of school, when I was on the crew team and had to wear these shorts. All the guys would stuff socks down the front as a joke."

If Robin has been transformed, O'Donnell himself, at 24, has gone the same way. In place of his former pink-cheeked sweetness is a crop-haired, square-jawed, azure-eyed cad who looks like a young Paul Newman – though the friendly, down-to-earth nature ►



remains. And it looks like his transformation will pay off. Literally. The actor is about to have his biggest payday to date for playing Boy Wonder to Val Kilmer's Batman in *Batman Forever*, released next month.

In it — alongside *Mask* star Jim Carrey who plays the Riddler, Nicole Kidman as Dr Chase Meridian and Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face — he plays an embittered, orphaned circus high-wire performer swept up by Val Kilmer's Caped Crusader into a superhero life of righting wrongs.

The metamorphosis into Robin didn't stop at the outrageous costume. His hair is given the treatment too. "They dyed my hair black every day, then moussed it so it became plastic, like Peter Brady's vampire wig in *The Brady Bunch*," he explains.

And he had to have his ear pierced. "That didn't go over real big with my family when I went home for holidays."

So does he have any jitters that his and Val Kilmer's over-the-top outfits could conceivably inspire more costumes, come Hallowe'en, among gay adults rather than hetero children?

O'Donnell replies: "This is a family-oriented *Batman*. Tim Burton, the director of *Batman Returns*, had a real dark spin on it with fantastic images, but Warner Bros (the film company that made *Batman Forever*) probably felt they had lost a lot of younger viewers.

"Director Joel Schumacher told me he'd had questions from reporters like: 'How are you going to deal with the homo-erotic relationship between the two of them?' What homo-erotic relationship?"

"When I was cast, Michael Keaton was Batman and it seemed like it was almost going to be like a father and son relationship. Val makes it much closer in age, which changes the dynamic of the dynamic duo."

Looking the way he does, O'Donnell became aware early on that he could make a pretty penny showing himself off. In Chicago, he made a very decent wage as a catalogue and TV commercials model for such clients as America's Marshall Field's department store.

And if he had to do a scene totally in the buff? "Never say 'never', but I think it would be highly unlikely," he replies. "I guess it's a kind of sexist thing because I don't mind seeing women naked, but I wasn't psyched to see Michael Douglas flounce around nude in *Basic Instinct*."

While we are on matters lustful, I ask who, to date, has been his best kissing co-star? "Let's see, I've had Drew Barrymore, Joan Cusack, Mary-Louise Parker, Saffron Burrows and Minnie Driver in *Circle of Friends*," he says, counting on his fingers.

"Who's the best kisser? Val Kilmer. No, just kidding. Am I forgetting somebody? Oh, Al Pacino's a pretty good kisser, but they cut that scene!"

Given his fresh-faced, unspoiled image, had such toyboy connoisseurs as Madonna or Cher ever ordered him up on

a platter? "None of the ladies has given me a call," he responds, glumly. "Should I take that as a bad sign? I'd like to meet Madonna. I've seen Cher out here dancing at a bar."

For all the Hollywood joking, O'Donnell insists he's only passing through. He's currently building a Chicago townhouse, not far from his family, with whom he remains close. He hasn't been seduced by Tinseltown.

"At the hot clubs, I don't know the bouncers and I have no pull at the door — they don't recognize me and, really, I don't care. The bars are filled with people just trying to slip you their business card, who tell you: 'Hey,

I'm a producer and I've written some stuff . . .' The women are like: 'Are you important enough for me to bother with?' But I met Reese in one of those places."

Ah, yes, Reese Witherspoon, the attractive, talented player in *Scent of a Woman* and the forthcoming *No Fear*, with whom O'Donnell was stepping out. "We hung out for a little while when *Scent of a Woman* came out," he recalls. "I did date her. It was the first time I had ever dated an actress. When I was in college, I never had a serious girlfriend because it was too much fun dating different girls. With Reese, it kind of didn't work out. It was nothing serious."

"The girl I've been dating for about 18 months is someone I met before these films started coming out," he says. "She's in Florida and I see her as much as I can."

"I think I see her more than most people in a long-distance relationship because I'm moving around so much, plus I've got the means to get her a ticket. We're in a good situation now, real happy."

Even though he hasn't been lacking for work, has he found time to blow money on nights out?

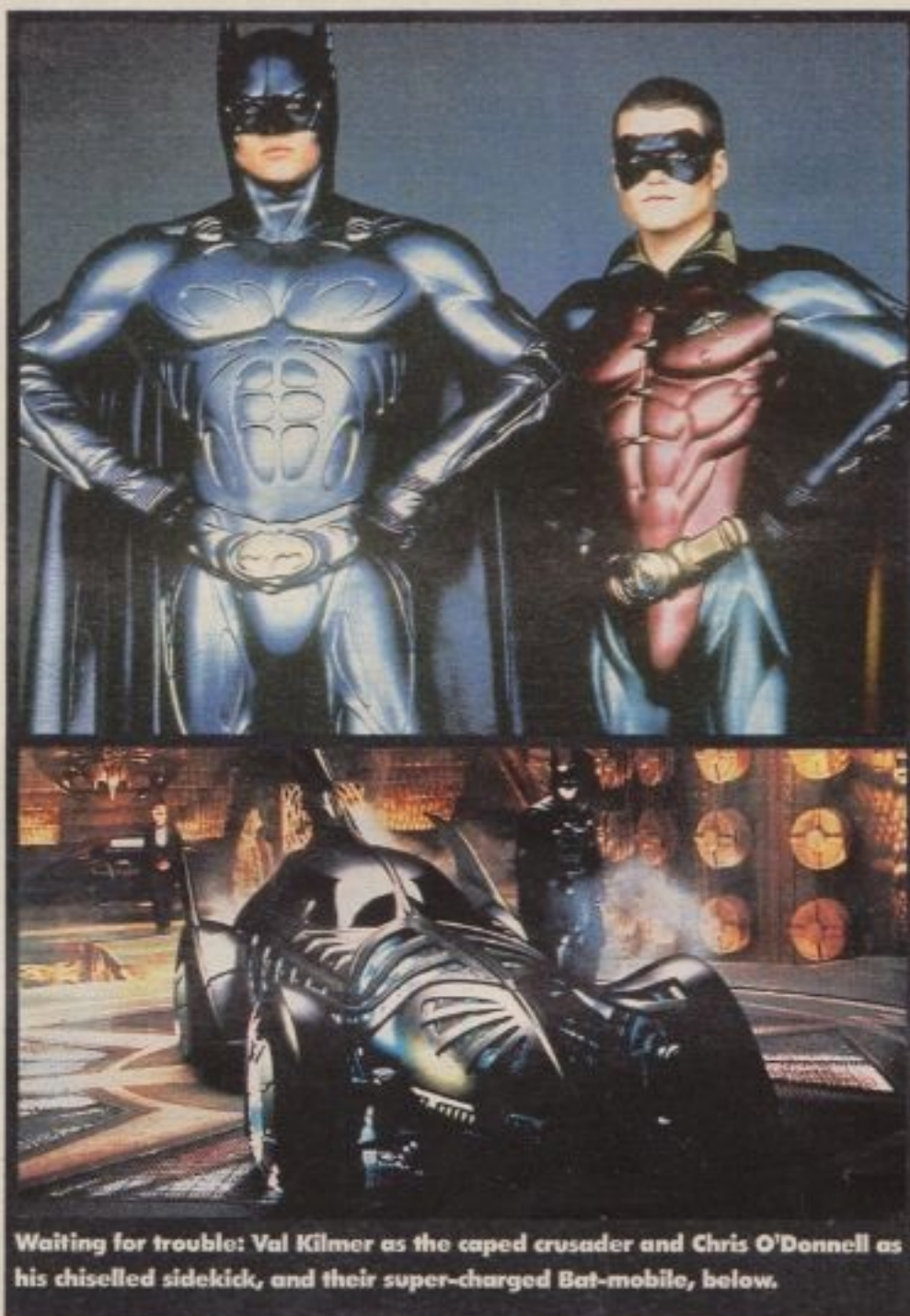
"Lately I've been antisocial about going to premieres and parties when my girlfriend isn't out here with me, but there have been moments when I think: 'You're not always going to be in the lime-

light. You should take advantage of it, enjoy yourself."

"So one night I was at a Planet Hollywood thing, by myself. Some friends were meeting me later, but I was standing there alone and Cindy Crawford walked in." O'Donnell strikes an awestruck pose like he's just seen God's face. "I was like: 'Hold on, man, look at *that*.' She's so beautiful and I would never in a million years go up and introduce myself, but she walked right up to me and said: 'Hi Chris, I want to introduce myself. I'm Cindy Crawford.' I'm like: 'Yeah. I know. Howya doin'?"

"I went downstairs to grab my friends, roommates from college who I was meeting, and said: 'Come on, I've got a table for us upstairs.' We sat down and I say: 'Guys, this is Cindy.' And Cindy's like: 'Let's get some margaritas!' and they went. 'YEAH!' So *that* was a cool night out."

Hollywood may not have totally corrupted Chris O'Donnell, but it's pretty clear he's growing up fast. ■



Waiting for trouble: Val Kilmer as the caped crusader and Chris O'Donnell as his chiselled sidekick, and their super-charged Bat-mobile, below.

'Who's the best kisser I've ever had? Well, I've had Drew Barrymore. But it has to be Val Kilmer. No! Just kidding!'